

Referring to Cigarette Smoking As an "Addiction" Is False, Misleading and Not Scientifically Supportable

The FDA Commissioner, David Kessler, in proposing to regulate cigarettes as a drug, has repeated the claim of anti-tobacco advocates that smoking is an "addiction." Anti-tobacco advocates also have proclaimed that the nicotine in tobacco is as addictive as cocaine or heroin.

There is no valid medical or scientific basis for viewing cigarette smoking as an addiction. The term addiction has taken on a new meaning in our society. One constantly hears that someone is addicted to food, television or exercise. Even former Surgeon General Koop once said that teenagers were "addicted" to video games. When we so broadly use a term, it loses its meaning, and that is what is happening in calling smoking an addiction. To do so ignores the *facts*, which are set forth below.

Moreover, to equate cigarette smoking with the use of hard drugs, such as cocaine and heroin, not only trivializes the serious illicit drug problem faced by our society today, but also is both misleading and potentially harmful to the American public.

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1. The *physiological* effects of addictive drugs are not shared by cigarette smoking.

- A person on hard drugs is intoxicated: the person's state of consciousness is altered, judgment and reasoning are impaired, coordination is affected, memory and concentration are substantially altered, and mood is visibly changed. Intoxication does not occur with cigarette smoking. The effect on mood and mental functioning is akin to drinking coffee.
- A person on hard drugs builds up a *tolerance* for the drug, so that, over time, larger and larger doses are needed to obtain the same desired physical effects. A smoker, by contrast, most often consumes the same number of cigarettes throughout his or her lifetime.
- Abrupt cessation of a hard drug following regular use will inevitably and predictably result in classic *withdrawal* symptoms, such as motor instability, muscle cramps, nausea, hallucinations and/or delusions, seizures, severe mood changes and suicide attempts. Withdrawal can be life-threatening if not medically supervised and treated. Cigarette smoking causes none of these signs or symptoms. The complaints sometimes associated with cigarette abstinence are a far cry from hard drug withdrawal and resemble more those of a dieter or other person giving up a well-liked *lifestyle choice*.

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2. From a *clinical* and *common sense* perspective, the experience of ex-smokers challenges the classification of smoking as an addiction.
 - Even the 1988 Surgeon General's Report, which argued for an addiction label on cigarette packs, acknowledged that 90 percent of the approximately 40 million ex-smokers in the U.S. (at that time) quit without any formal cessation program. The public can hardly be expected to believe that the vast majority of heroin or cocaine addicts could quit based simply on a personal choice to do so, as in the case of smoking.
3. Cigarette smokers do not suffer the *sociological* impairments (*e.g.*, crime, family problems and unpredictable employment) that plague hard drug users because they are not behaviorally dominated by a drug-induced state.
4. The use of the word addiction in this context is emotionally charged, misleading, and subject to misuse.
 - In recent years, the U.S. government, particularly through Surgeon Generals' reports and the NIDA, has advanced definitions of addiction that downplay the physiological effects of addictive drugs. Such definitions are contrived so as to include tobacco. Once the term addiction is so broadly defined, it loses all meaning because it encompasses any behavior that people engage in on a regular basis -- coffee drinking, eating disorders and compulsive television watching, for example.
 - The ability of smokers to lead productive personal and professional lives, while smoking, raises profound questions about the appropriateness of branding them as "addicts."
 - Telling smokers that they are addicted undermines their motivation to quit on their own; by far the most efficient and frequent way people quit smoking.

People smoke because it is a personal choice based on personal satisfaction and pleasure. The role of nicotine in tobacco smoking is more like the role of caffeine in coffee drinking. People similarly quit smoking based on their personal decisions to do so. The conclusion in the 1989 Surgeon General's Report that nearly half of all adults who ever smoked have quit is consistent with most of our personal experiences that quitting may be difficult for some, but, with proper motivation, people can, and do, quit.

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